

# Educational, psychosocial, and protection outcomes of child- and youth-focused programming with Somali refugees in Dollo Ado, Ethiopia

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*Child- and youth-friendly spaces have become a common feature of emergency humanitarian provision. This study reports on the outcomes of child and youth learning centres (CYLCs) in Ethiopia's Buramino Camp established for those fleeing conflict in Somalia. Eighty-five youths completed baseline assessments shortly after arrival and follow-up assessments three to six months later. Caregivers of 106 younger children completed similar appraisals. 693 children attending the CYLCs completed pre- and post-educational assessments, which indicated major gains—significant at  $p < 0.0001$ —in both literacy (younger children,  $t = 9.06$ ; youth,  $t = 13.87$ ) and numeracy (younger children,  $t = 13.94$ ; youths,  $t = 17.10$ ). Children's CYLC attendance increased reports of met needs among caregivers ( $t = 2.53$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) and youths ( $t = 2.57$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), and, among caregivers but not youths, significantly moderated protection concerns ( $t = 2.39$ ,  $p < 0.05$ , and  $t = -1.90$ ,  $p = 0.06$ , respectively). There was general improvement in psychosocial well-being over time for all children; CYLC attendance predicted greater reductions in reported difficulties only among younger children ( $t = 2.51$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ).*

**Keywords:** child protection, children, education, Ethiopia, humanitarian programming, psychosocial well-being, refugee camp, Somalia

## Background

Given the increasing recognition of the vulnerabilities of children and youths in complex emergencies, child protection programming is an expanding feature of emergency humanitarian response. Continuity of schooling is widely seen as a key element of child protection (INEE, 2010). However, where access to formal educational provision is delayed or restricted, provision of non-formal education may be an important interim measure or, for those with little prior access to schooling, an important bridge to enhanced livelihood opportunities. Child- and youth-friendly spaces—involving the establishment of a secure physical space where structured activities are provided by supervised animators (Wessells and Kostelny, 2013)—are a common platform for the provision of such non-formal educational programming, alongside a range of psychosocial activities. These can include diverse cultural, recreational, and sporting endeavours (Metzler et al., 2015), but typically reflect the goal of enabling emotional and social well-being through structured activities enabled by adult facilitators in a safe environment.

The adoption of child- and youth-friendly spaces as a programming approach in humanitarian emergencies is now widespread. More than 200 such programmes have been documented across humanitarian contexts within a single year (Ager et al., 2013). The initiative is currently recorded as a component of contemporary humanitarian response in settings such as Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Iraq, Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, and South Sudan (ReliefWeb, 2019). The relative emphasis placed on educational, psychosocial, and protection outcomes—and thus the range of programme activities adopted to address them—vary widely. Nonetheless, the existence of inter-agency guidance on their operation and the assumed scalability of implementation suggests that there is sufficient commonality in methods and goals to characterise meaningfully these spaces as a distinct programming approach (INEE and IASC, 2011; Wessells and Kostelny, 2013).

Despite the ubiquity of child- and youth-friendly spaces in humanitarian response environments, evidence on their effectiveness has been limited until only recently. A systematic review found less than 10 studies documenting their impact, with the majority displaying fundamental methodological weaknesses that limited the interpretation of findings (Ager et al., 2013). Process evaluations suggest that the establishment of dedicated spaces for activities for children and youths are well received by people affected by emergencies and provide a potential base for broader outreach within communities (Wessells and Kostelny, 2013; UNICEF, 2015). Yet, it has only been with a coordinated series of impact evaluations that robust evidence on outcomes has begun to emerge (Metzler et al., 2015). This has suggested that programmes can have a substantive bearing in domains such as well-being and protection, but that the extent that they do so differs widely by context (Hermosilla et al., 2019).

Broader evidence on non-formal education programming in humanitarian crises is also weak (Kagawa, 2005). The strongest evidence is arguably that regarding the provision of psychosocial interventions. Recent years have seen the publication of a number of studies of structured group interventions addressing the reduction of mental health symptoms in child and youth populations in humanitarian crisis areas (Jordans et al., 2009; Bangpan et al., 2017). These interventions, though, have generally been tightly protocol-driven and delivered by relatively well-trained and supervised cadres. Activities within safe spaces are usually more loosely structured and provided by facilitators with lower levels of training and support; the generalisability of the psychosocial intervention evidence-base to child- and youth-friendly spaces is uncertain, therefore.

This paper represents an attempt to strengthen the evidence base of this programming approach by analysing findings drawn from one of the evaluations reported on in the recent meta-analysis of Hermosilla et al. (2019). The paper focuses on the implementation of child- and youth-friendly spaces established at Buramino Camp in Dollo Ado, Ethiopia, opened to accommodate Somali refugees fleeing to the country from late 2011.

## Context and programmatic response

The Government of Ethiopia's Administration for Refugee and Returnee Affairs (ARRA) and the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) established Buramino Camp in December 2011. It was the fifth refugee camp to be set up in response to the drought in the Horn of Africa and the prevailing conflict in Somalia. With a capacity to accommodate 40,000 Somali refugees, it was constructed 23 kilometres northwest of the Dollo Ado transit centre in southwest Ethiopia.

Having been assigned by ARRA to provide educational services in the camp, World Vision Ethiopia opened its first child and youth learning centre (CYLC) in January 2012. In line with the characteristic approach to safe spaces for children and youths in humanitarian contexts (Wessells and Kostelny, 2013), this offered a location in which a range of activities were available to children aged from 6–17 years. A second CYLC opened in May 2012.

The CYLCs consisted of between six and eight temporary classroom structures, latrines for children and staff, an office and storeroom, water tank, a kitchen, and a playground with steel-structured play equipment. Both spaces emphasised functional literacy and numeracy skills (in Somali), facilitated by animators recruited from the camp and the local community (some with teaching experience) and trained and regularly supervised in the delivery of a specifically-designed non-formal education curriculum. Based on discussions with ARRA and the parents of children attending these centres, psychosocial activities, such as cultural dance, drawing, recreational play, and singing, were included, but to a modest degree. Onsite counselling and a feeding programme were also offered. The centres were considered to be short-term interventions while the camp was set up, and in advance of the provision of formal education.

To increase coverage across the camp's population, each centre provided two three-hour sessions:

- a morning session for younger children aged from 6–11 years; and
- an afternoon session for youths aged from 12–17 years.

The first CYLC provided activities for 784 children (500 aged from 6–11 years and 284 aged from 12–17 years), whereas the second CYLC provided activities for 787 children (506 aged from 6–11 years and 281 aged from 12–17 years). With an estimated camp population during this period of more than 3,300 children aged from 6–11 years and 1,000 aged from 12–17 years (UNHCR, 2012), this provision only covered a minority of the children and youths present. Although there were plans to roll out further CYLCs, during the time frame of this study—and before the construction and opening of formal schools in 2013—these remained the only two spaces where structured educational activities were on offer in the camp (other than informal *madrasas* in some camp blocks). Some parents, youths, and children may have declined access to programming had it been available, but for a majority, non-attendance was the result of the CYLCs having reached their maximum capacity.

## Methods

Measurement tools were selected to assess impacts with respect to the educational, psychosocial, and protection outcomes of attendance at CYLCs. Educational attainment was gauged using an adapted functional literacy assessment tool (FLAT), which included an appraisal of basic numeracy (World Vision International, 2011). The strengths and difficulties questionnaire (SDQ) (Goodman, 2001), a measure of pro-social behaviour and emotional and social adjustment that has been widely used in east Africa, was adopted as a measure of psychosocial well-being. This was accompanied by a briefer, locally-validated, pilot version of the developmental assets profile (B-DAP) (Scales et al., 2015), which determines the internal and external coping resources available to a child. The child protection rapid assessment (CPRA) (GPC, CPWG, 2012), which has been utilised extensively in humanitarian contexts, was used to elicit reports on unmet basic needs (such as food and shelter) and protection concerns (such as abduction, forced recruitment, sexual violence, and violent attacks). Survey data were complemented by structured participatory activities with groups of boys and girls, and with CYLC facilitators, parents, and community leaders. These involved 9–13 participants and participatory ranking methods (which elicit narratives on presenting challenges and their relative priority) (Ager, Stark, and Potts, 2010) and before-and-after matrix scoring (Catley et al., 2013).

Baseline data were collected using the psychosocial and protection tools, prior to any participation in CYLC activities, from a sample of caregivers of children aged from 6–11 years and directly from youths aged between 12 and 17 years. A baseline sample of 160 caregivers and 160 youths was targeted, based on power calculations to detect the impact of an intervention with a 0.30 effect size with 90 per cent power and a confidence level of 0.05, with a probability of CYLC attendance of 0.50 (UNICEF, 2011, and allowing for anticipated attrition at follow-up. As of the commencement of the study, the first CYLC was operational with registration taking place as families arrived at the camp from the transit centre. A sample of youths and caregivers of younger children that had not yet taken part in any activities was selected from this registration list. Using a randomised cluster sampling approach like that adopted by similar studies in camp settings (Metzler et al., 2019), the sample for the second CYLC still under construction (operational from May 2012) was chosen via random selection of settlement blocks within the proposed catchment area of the camp. Each randomly selected block was visited and the household of every third numbered tent—if it contained children aged from 6–17 years—was invited to participate. If eligible youths and caregivers in the household were not available during initial visits, enumerators returned on up to three occasions. In all cases, caregivers and youths were invited to participate voluntarily in interviews, with the assurance that refusal would in no way jeopardise access to services for their child or themselves; verbal consent was secured prior to proceeding. The gathering of baseline data was completed with 149 caregivers of children aged from 6–11 years and with 142 youths aged from 12–17 years.

The study team sought to re-interview these same caregivers and youths between three and six months after the onset of CYLC activities. As well as repeating all measures, the extent to which the child or youth had been present at a CYLC in the intervening period was ascertained through self-reporting and the facility's attendance records. The study categorised 'attenders' as those children and youths who had attended at least 70 per cent of the available CYLC sessions and 'non-attenders' as those who had never appeared at any CYLC sessions (resulting in a total of 87 partial attenders being excluded from the subsequent analysis). Baseline and follow-up data collections were successfully completed with the caregivers of 40 attenders and 66 non-attenders aged from 6–11 years (that is, 71 per cent of the baseline sample) and with 45 attenders and 40 non-attenders aged from 12–17 years (that is, 59 per cent of the baseline sample).

Independent of these assessment procedures, educational attainment was measured at baseline by administration of the FLAT as part of the enrolment process at the CYLCs. A FLAT assessment at baseline was completed by 587 children aged from 6–11 years, of which 437 completed a follow-up assessment using the same measure between three and six months later. Similarly, 338 youths aged from 12–17 years completed a FLAT assessment at baseline, of which 256 were appraised at follow-up. With FLAT assessments not considered feasible outside of the context of the CYLCs (nor, indeed, relevant given the lack of educational opportunity beyond this provision), these evaluations served as a before-and-after measure of educational attainment in CYLC attenders (rather than a comparison of attenders versus non-attenders).

Participatory activities were completed at baseline with 34 groups of children, segmented by age, gender, and camp block location. These activities were repeated at endline with 25 groups, again segmented by age, gender, and camp block location. Participatory activities were also performed at baseline and endline with parents, CYLC facilitators at each site, with the community advisory board for the CYLCs and the camp's refugee committee.

Bivariate statistical analysis was conducted to determine whether or not there were significant differences between the scores for attenders and non-attenders at baseline and in change scores (that is, difference-of-difference) for these two groups between baseline and follow-up. With a common programming approach shared by the two centres and transfers of enrolment occurring between them during the study period, data for the two CYLCs were combined and analysed together.

## Findings

### Sample characteristics

A comparison of the baseline scores of younger children retained for analysis at endline and those lost to follow-up indicated no significant differences in scores for any variable (age,  $p=0.861$ ; gender,  $p=0.891$ ; development assets,  $p=0.091$ ; difficulties,  $p=0.553$ ; prosocial well-being,  $p=0.133$ ; or protection concerns,  $p=0.509$ ) other than

unmet needs (where there was a significant trend for those with greater reported needs to be retained;  $p=0.028$ ).

A comparison of the baseline scores of retained youths and youths lost to follow-up similarly revealed a significant difference only with respect to one variable: protection concerns, which were more likely to be reported in youths retained in the study ( $p=0.027$ ). There were no differences in relation to (age,  $p=0.342$ ; development assets,  $p=0.736$ ; difficulties  $p=0.142$ ; gender,  $p=0.413$ ; prosocial well-being,  $p=0.168$ ; or unmet needs,  $p=0.916$ ).

Table 1 shows the characteristics of the retained study sample. The ratio of boys to girls was approximately even for all ages and groups. There were no statistically significant differences between attenders and non-attenders with regard to demographic variables for either age group. In terms of the baseline scores, attending and non-attending youths were well matched for all outcomes (no significant differences in development assets,  $p=0.418$ , difficulties,  $p=0.688$ , prosocial well-being,  $p=0.206$ , protection concerns,  $p=0.594$ , and unmet needs,  $p=0.765$ ). At baseline, caregivers of those who went on to access CYLCs tended to report greater difficulties for their

**Table 1.** Baseline characteristics of the final study sample of CYLC attenders and non-attenders

Age (years)	CYLC status	Gender, age, vulnerability	Value	Primary caregivers	
6–11	Attenders	Girls (n)	19	Mother	37
		Boys (n)	21	Father	2
		Mean age (s.d.)	8.5 (1.4)	Other	1
		Vulnerable (%)	23.1	–	–
	Non-attenders	Girls (n)	33	Mother	57
		Boys (n)	33	Father	7
		Mean age (s.d.)	8.9 (1.5)	Other	2
		Vulnerable (%)	21.5	–	–
12–17	Attenders	Girls (n)	22	Mother	34
		Boys (n)	23	Father	5
		Mean age (s.d.)	13.6 (1.3)	Other	6
		Vulnerable (%)	29.1	–	–
	Non-attenders	Girls (n)	15	Mother	33
		Boys (n)	25	Father	3
		Mean age (s.d.)	13.7 (1.7)	Other	4
		Vulnerable (%)	22.9	–	–

**Notes:** n=number; s.d.=standard deviation.

**Source:** authors.

children ( $p < 0.001$ ) and greater protection concerns ( $p = 0.024$ ); otherwise there were no significant differences in the baseline scores for carers of attenders and non-attenders (development assets,  $p = 0.192$ , prosocial well-being,  $p = 0.710$ , and unmet needs,  $p = 0.182$ ). While non-attendance potentially could reflect motivational and other factors vis-à-vis children or their caregivers, and not just the lack of capacity of CYLCs to enrol all children in the target age range, this general lack of baseline differences suggests that non-attenders possibly could constitute a valid comparison group for judging the impacts of CYLCs (that is, differing principally only in relation to attendance at the facility). Nonetheless, the inclination of caregivers of attending young children to have reported somewhat greater concerns regarding their children's well-being and protection at baseline clearly needs to be taken into account when interpreting the outcomes at endline.

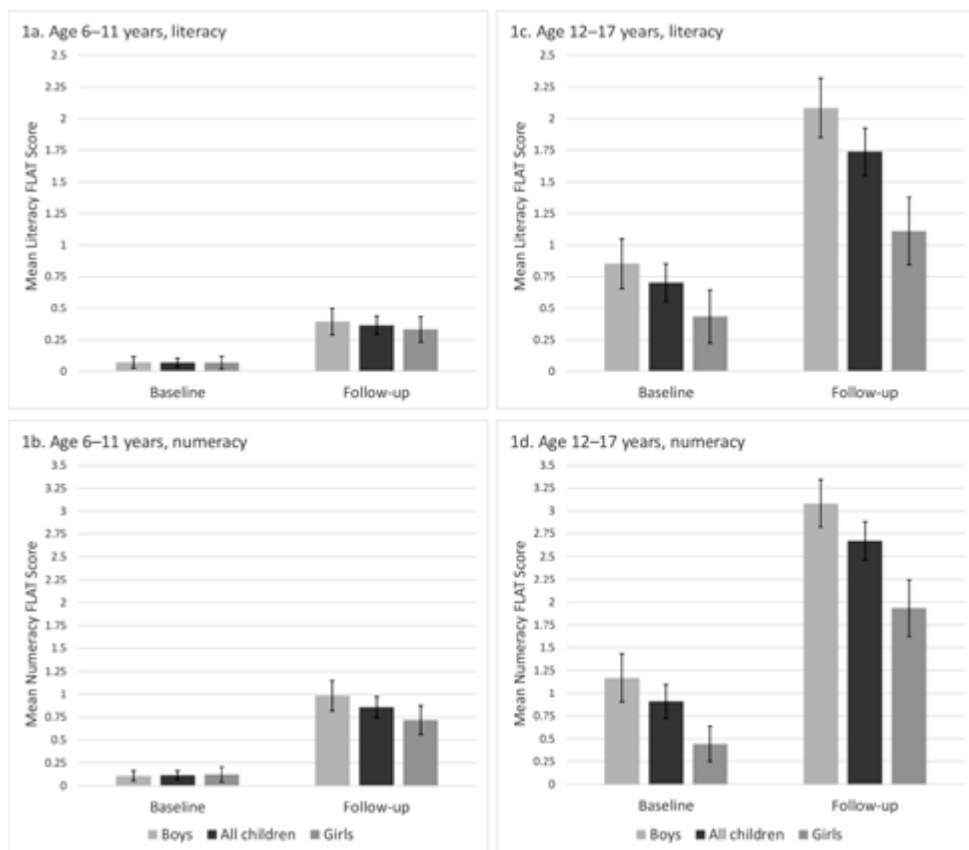
Although there was a tendency among both younger and older cohorts for a greater proportion of attenders than non-attenders to meet the criterion of vulnerability (23.1 versus 21.5 per cent and 29.1 versus 22.9 per cent, respectively) (see Table 1), these differences were non-significant. CYLCs were thus successful in reaching children from vulnerable households in broad proportion to their representation in the population. There were not any notable barriers to their engagement with these households, yet CYLCs did not establish an especially strong linkage with vulnerable children.

## Educational outcomes

The measures indicated major gains in basic literacy and numeracy over the study period among those attending the CYLC (see Figure 1). Given that it was the only facility within the camp where structured education was available, this finding is most plausibly attributed to its programming. For younger children aged from 6–11 years, there was significant improvement in literacy between baseline and follow-up, with the mean literacy FLAT scores increasing from 0.07 to 0.36 ( $t = 9.06$ ,  $p < 0.0001$ ). Approximately 22 per cent of children who could not read at all at baseline (score = 0) could read letters, words, or sentences at follow-up. Younger children also achieved major improvements in numeracy between baseline and follow-up, with mean numeracy FLAT scores rising from 0.11 to 0.86 ( $t = 13.94$ ,  $p < 0.0001$ ). The proportion of children who could recognise the numerals 1–10 increased from four to 30 per cent over this period, while those who could reliably recognise numerals up to 100 increased from two to nine per cent. Virtually no children in this age group had addition skills at baseline; however, six per cent of children had acquired some at follow-up. Boys were significantly more likely to show a greater improvement than girls in numeracy, with mean scores rising to 0.88 for the former as compared to 0.60 for the latter ( $t = 2.65$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ).

Youths aged from 12–17 years recorded even greater increases in literacy and numeracy than younger children. The mean FLAT literacy scores rose significantly ( $t = 13.87$ ,  $p < 0.0001$ ) from 0.70 (some letter recognition) to 1.74 (some ability to read words). The proportion of children with no reading skills fell from 69 per cent at

**Figure 1.** Improvements in literacy and numeracy between baseline and follow-up for CYLC attenders by gender and age (with 95 per cent confidence intervals)



Source: authors.

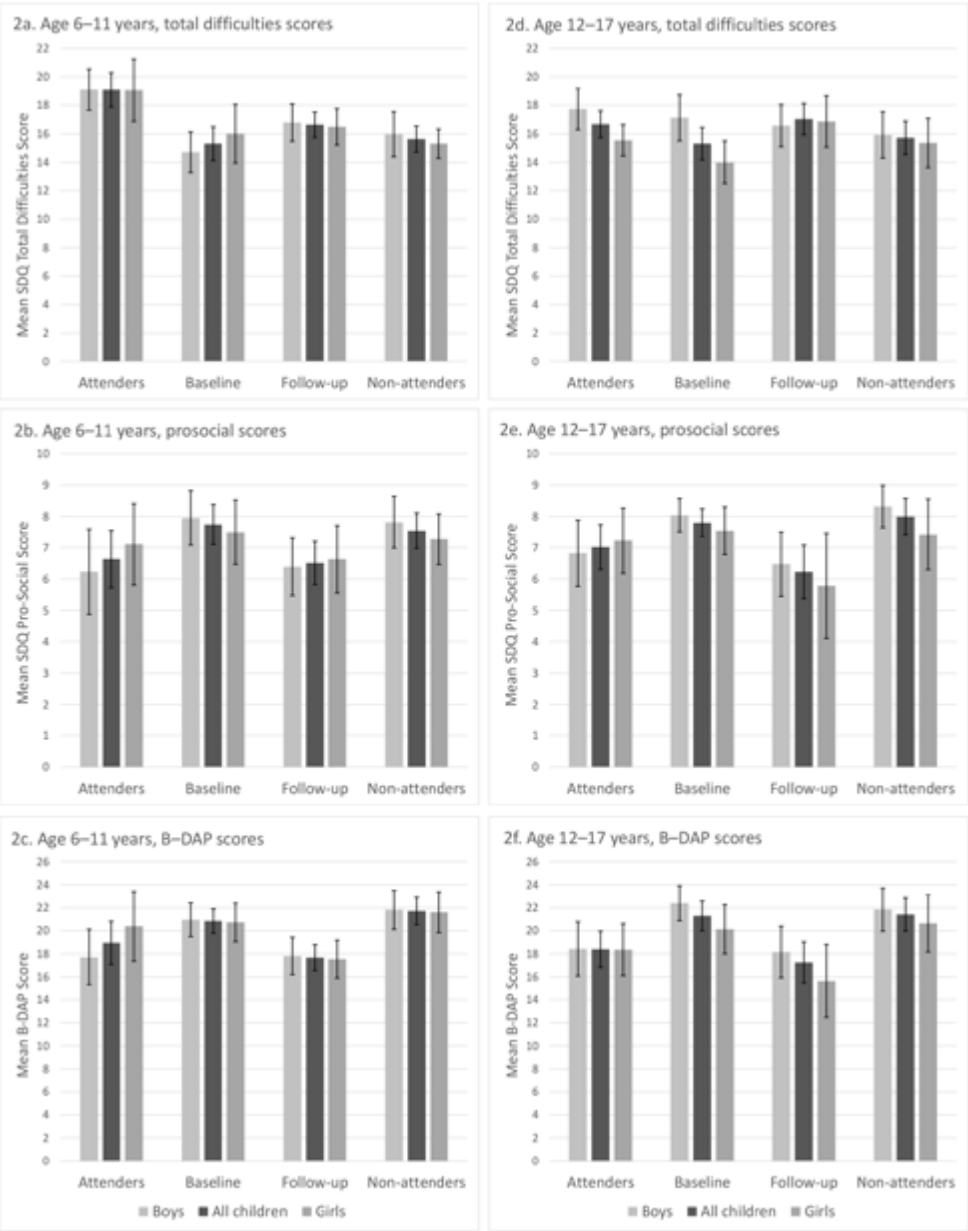
baseline to 30 per cent at follow-up. These older children also made major improvements in numeracy; the mean FLAT numeracy scores increased from 0.91 (recognition of numerals up to 10) to 2.67 (ability to add numbers) between baseline and follow-up ( $t=17.10$ ,  $p<0.0001$ ). The proportion of children with no numeracy skills decreased from 63 to 11 per cent over this period. Within this older age group, there was significantly greater improvement in literacy among boys than girls, with the former averaging gains of 1.23 in scores as compared to 0.68 for girls ( $t=3.66$ ,  $p<0.0005$ ). There was also a significant trend with regard to boys making greater gains than girls in numeracy (1.91 versus 1.49,  $t=1.99$ ,  $p<0.05$ ).

## Psychosocial outcomes

Figure 2 displays score trends on the SDQ difficulties, SDQ prosocial, and B-DAP scales as measures of psychosocial well-being among children aged from 6–11 years between baseline and follow-up. These all pointed up appreciable positive improvements over time for attending and non-attending children: a reduction in difficulties,



**Figure 2.** Psychosocial measures for children attending and not attending the CYLCs (with 95 per cent confidence intervals)



Source: authors.

increases in prosocial behaviour, and gains in developmental assets. Overall, average SDQ total difficulties scores fell from a level suggestive of potential adjustment problems to one approaching the ‘normal’ range (17.6 to 15.5,  $t=3.98$ ,  $p<0.0001$ ), whereas average SDQ prosocial scores rose from a low ‘normal’ range to a mean score clearly within the ‘normal’ range (6.57 to 7.70,  $t=3.36$ ,  $p<0.005$ ). Average B-DAP scores

increased from 18.2 to 21.6 ( $t=5.06$ ,  $p<0.0001$ ), with the proportion in the bottom quartile ‘poor’ range decreasing from 33 per cent at baseline to six per cent at follow-up.

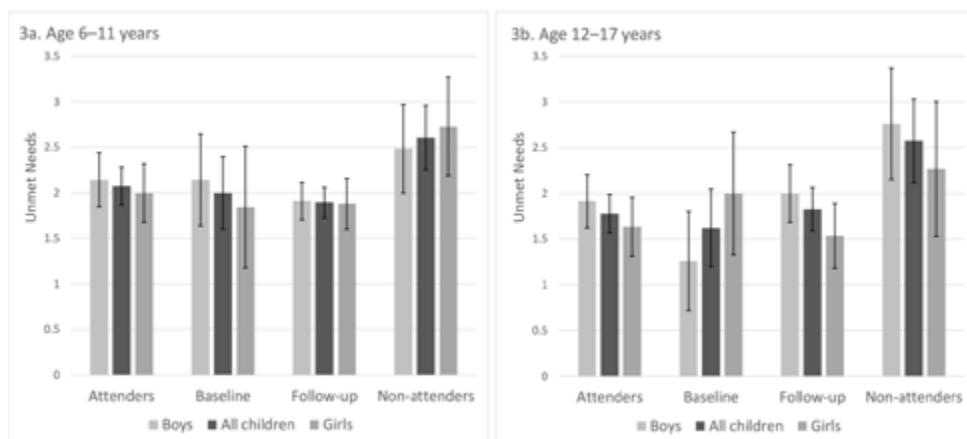
Figure 2 indicates similar observations on these scales for children aged from 12–17 years, again for both those attending and non-attending. Overall average SDQ difficulties scores declined (from 16.8 to 15.4,  $t=2.54$ ,  $p<0.05$ ) to levels within the ‘normal’ range for this age group, whereas overall average SDQ prosocial scores rose (from 6.71 to 7.83,  $t=3.57$ ,  $p<0.001$ ) to well within the normal range for this age group, with the greatest change among boys. Overall average B-DAP scores increased from 17.9 to 21.3 ( $t=4.83$ ,  $p<0.0001$ ), with the proportion of children in the bottom quartile ‘poor’ range of the scale decreasing from 37 per cent at baseline to five per cent at follow-up.

With respect to the clear overall trend of substantive improvements in psychosocial well-being as children and their families settled into the camp, there was only one significant indication of the effect of CYLC attendance across all measures of psychosocial well-being in both age groups. Children aged from 6–11 years experienced a 3.77 mean decrease in SDQ difficulties if attending the CYLC as compared to a mean decrease of 1.0 for non-attenders ( $t=2.51$ ,  $p<0.05$ ). This effect was largely attributable to the impact among boys (19.1 to 14.7,  $t=3.81$ ,  $p<0.005$ ) than girls (19.1 to 16.0,  $t=2.05$ ,  $p=0.057$ ).

## Basic needs

Carers of young children not attending the CYLC reported more unmet needs at follow-up than at baseline, a finding not observed in the reports of carers of young children attending the CYLC (an increase of 0.71 (1.89 to 2.61) versus a small decrease of 0.08 (2.08 to 2.00),  $t=2.53$ ,  $p<0.05$ ) (see Figure 3). There were similar trends among older children: those not attending the CYLC reported more unmet needs at follow-up than at baseline (an increase of 0.75 (1.83 to 2.58)) while those attending recorded a small decrease (0.16 (1.78 to 1.62),  $t=2.57$ ,  $p<0.05$ ).

**Figure 3.** Unmet needs in children attending and not attending the CYLCs (with 95 per cent confidence intervals)



Source: authors.

The provision via the CYLC of basic education, shelter from the elements, and a daily hot meal was clearly appreciated by both carers and children amidst escalating anxiety about basic needs in the months after arrival at the camp.

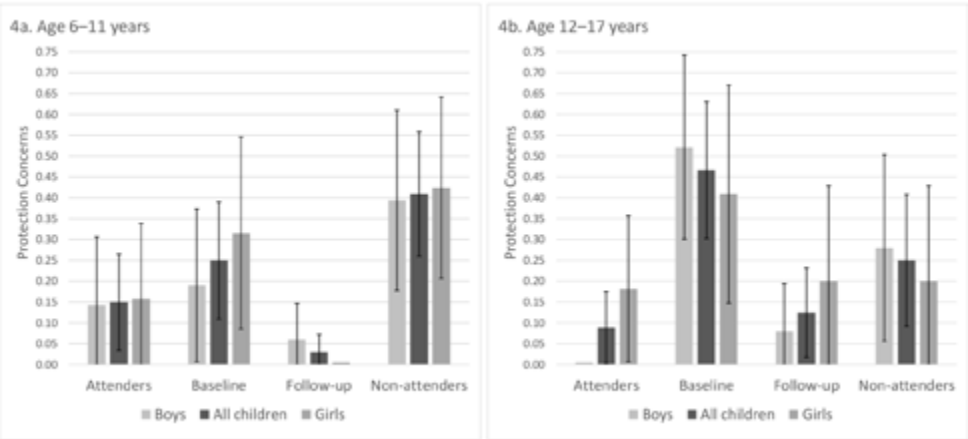
Protection concerns

Figure 4 indicates, against a backdrop of wide variation in reporting, a clear trend of increased reporting of protection concerns at follow-up among carers of younger children (boys and girls) and older children (boys and girls). The increases, though, were significantly greater among the former in cases where children were not attending the CYLC (an increase of 0.38 (0.03 to 0.41) reports versus an increase of 0.10 (0.15 to 0.25) reports,  $t=2.39$ ,  $p<0.05$ ). Overall, CYLC attendance had no significant impact on older children’s perceptions of protection risks over time. Among boys, however, CYLC attendance predicted a greater increase in reports (a rise of 0.52 for CYLC attenders versus 0.20 for non-attenders,  $t=2.04$ ,  $p<0.05$ ). For carers of younger children and older children themselves, the protection concern that had amplified most since arrival at the camp was fear of attack. Fears about sexual violence and rape remained high in both reporting periods.

Triangulation from participatory activities

Opportunities for education were ranked as the top priority in participatory exercises with children and youths at baseline, and second (behind health) by caregivers. At follow-up, education was no longer rated as a priority need by children and youths who had attended the CYLC (being highlighted in less than one in five discussions). Advances in literacy and numeracy—as well as the ensuing benefits—were flagged in follow-up discussions with parents:

**Figure 4.** Protection concerns among children attending and not attending the CYLCs (with 95 per cent confidence intervals)



Source: authors.

*From the beginning, the children, most of them could not read . . . now, many children can write their name, can read their name.*

*Children from [the CYLC] are given a clear picture of their future . . . chances to play on the ground, now they are different.*

Similarly, community leaders on the Refugee Coordinating Committee stated:

*Previously, they were like uneducated and they were like dark. Now, they have education . . . they are in the light.*

*Now, they have their morale . . . they are encouraged because they are given bags, books . . . they are inspired.*

*If the child is uneducated, he will not know which rights he has and what his parents have. If he is educated, he will understand and be respectful of his parents.*

These benefits were contrasted with the lack of access to education in Somalia before flight to Ethiopia. A member of the CYLC Parent Committee pointed out:

*After we came to the refugee camp, we got our children education.*

Broader psychosocial ramifications were reported by CYLC staff, both with respect to the emotional and social well-being of children, as well as in relationships with parents:

*There was a little girl. She used to urinate in the class because of stress and psychosocial problems. . . . [Now] she laughs, plays, is confident and academically she is active.*

*[Now] the parents also are not beating their children . . . rather they are discussing and getting directions from the children.*

The protective benefits of CYLC attendance were recognised, too. One parent said:

*Before opening [the CYLC] children were going around the market doing not good activities.*

A member of the Refugee Coordinating Committee added:

*Before we were so afraid for our girls, but now I can say that it is better.*

By the time of follow-up, economic issues—a lack of work and opportunities to earn income—had emerged alongside health and basic needs—a lack of non-food items, and food, shelter, and water—as priority concerns in participatory ranking discussions. One parent noted:

*We are facing a lot of challenges . . . people don't have medicine . . . the hospital is only by name . . . there is no medications.*

And a participant in a group of boys aged from 6–11 years underlined:

*There is a lack of jobs, the camp has no job vacancies*

Both the CYLC Parent Committee and the Refugee Coordinating Committee witnessed an increase in the separation of families owing to the harsh conditions of the camp, as some people returned to Somalia and others sought to find their way to the capital of Ethiopia, Addis Ababa. In particular, given the rocky soil and the high winds, the camp tents provided insecure accommodation. A youth and a caregiver participant respectively stated:

*The wind blew off our tent—it is not protecting us from the rain and mosquitoes.*

*The tent is torn with scissors— how can you protect your goods?*

A shortage of firewood—flagged as a source of vulnerability at baseline—remained an issue of major concern. A child participant emphasised:

*If a woman goes to collect firewood she will be raped by the host community.*

Although security and protection issues were prioritised infrequently in participatory discussions, there was a discourse regarding the increasing risk of sexual violence in the camp and its environs among community leaders. Before and after matrix scoring exercises with the CYLC Parent Committee and the Refugee Coordinating Committee confirmed that the threats posed by violence and abduction were seen as having decreased substantially since crossing the border, especially after the Ethiopian National Defense Force had established an ‘exclusion zone’ in Somalian territory neighbouring Dollo Ado following a number of incidents in the early months of the camp’s establishment. Yet, both groups believed that life in the camp entailed increased risks of sexual violence. While male members of the Refugee Coordinating Committee felt that this issue had been resolved, female members rated it as ongoing. Members of the CYLC Parent Committee were clear that this was a continuing problem. As one remarked:

*Forced abduction is less now, although still there is abduction but still Somalia is a home of war and killing. We have no firewood because we cannot go out of the camp in order to collect firewood and girls meet abduction and rape.*

In this context, the fact that the CYLC provided a secure (fenced and guarded) setting for both girls and boys to spend several hours each day was undoubtedly perceived to be a major benefit. Similarly, with fuelwood challenging to collect and frustration at the lack of familiar staples in the food ration supplied, the provision of the hot meal to children attending the CYLC was considered to be of substantial value.

## Discussion

The study findings suggest that the establishment of the CYLCs in the early months of the refugees' residence at Buramino Camp yielded significant educational benefits for those attending and moderated opinions about unmet needs. The positive impacts on the psychosocial well-being of children and protection concerns were, however, restricted to younger children, as reported by carers.

Very low levels of literacy and numeracy were discovered among children on arrival at Buramino Camp, commensurate with parental reports of a lack of opportunity to access schooling in Somalia in the years before flight. The CYLCs served to create a foundation of basic skills in these areas that could then be built on when formal schools opened in the camp early in 2013. While younger children largely enrolled in school, youths frequently continued with an accelerated learning programme—developed from the CYLC curriculum—within the two centres studied and a third one that opened in January 2013. Consequently, the CYLCs effectively provided emergency education to younger children in the period in which formal schooling was unavailable and a basis for continuing non-formal education among older children.

The findings regarding protection concerns need to be interpreted with respect to the evidence from multiple sources of worsening conditions in Buramino Camp over time. The physical conditions rendered living conditions harsh, and allied to severely limited opportunities for income generation, competition for resources was fierce. The threat of sexual violence and thefts from households combined to exacerbate fear and insecurity, despite the significantly reduced danger of incursions by Al-Shabab. The salience of a fenced, guarded area in which children are occupied with activities for three hours under adult supervision is apparent in this context. The findings clearly revealed that caregivers viewed their children as safer if attending the CYLC and valued it for this role, signalling the potential importance of the protective function of safe spaces and similar programme approaches in such settings. Given the nature of protection risks predominantly identified by this age group (such as being hurt in a military attack and sexual violence), the greater rise in the protection concerns of older boys attending the CYLC as compared to those not in attendance seems more likely to be attributable to an increased awareness of these issues, rather than to increased exposure to them through attendance.

In light of mounting reports about harsh conditions, the clear overall trend for children's psychosocial well-being to improve over time may appear to be paradoxical. However, the disorientation of children and youths on first arrival at the camp provides a potential explanation. In spite of the challenges presented by camp life, children seem to have followed a trajectory of adjustment as they grew more familiar with their surroundings, whether or not they attended the CYLC. This is in line with burgeoning evidence of the resilience of children based on their capacity to mobilise personal, familial, and community resources, even in the absence of programmatic support (Ungar et al., 2015; Ager and Metzler, 2017). It is also a consistent

finding in the series of impact evaluations of which this study was a part (Metzler et al., 2015, 2019), and in a recent analysis of Panter-Brick et al. (2018) of youths in Syrian refugee settlement areas in north Jordan.

Notwithstanding this general trend towards adaptation, younger children, especially boys, demonstrated a particular reduction in psychosocial difficulties if they had attended the CYLC. As noted earlier, initially planned psychosocial activities had only been implemented in part, with both ARRA and caregivers eager for an explicit education focus given the lack of schooling available. Nonetheless, the structure and order of the CYLC environment appears to have especially assisted younger boys. It is not possible to judge whether or not greater psychosocial benefits would have been observed if psychosocial activities—which are commonly reported to have more of an impact on girls (Metzler et al., 2015; Bangpan et al., 2017)—had been accorded increased prominence in the CYLC curriculum.

The only other measures where significant gender differences were identified pertained to educational attainment. Male youths had higher baseline scores for literacy and numeracy than female youths, and demonstrated greater improvement at follow-up (significantly in the case of literacy). The former finding clearly reflects gender disparity in school enrolment in Somalia (UNICEF, 2017), whereas the latter suggests differences in the educational engagement of girls and boys, either within the CYLC itself, or in relation to the extent to which caregivers reinforced learning in the household, or both. The trend among younger children for boys to record greater increases than girls, even with the same (low) starting level, suggests that this effect is not artefactual. World Vision International thus used it in refresher training and supervision of staff to ensure that facilitators interacted more effectively with girls during teaching sessions.

With the CYLC curriculum linked to age, and data collected via different methods (parent report and self-report, respectively) for children aged from 6–11 years and those aged from 12–17 years, a direct statistical comparison of trends for younger and older children is inappropriate. Yet, while CYLC attendance evidently had significant protective and promotive impacts on younger children, the effects on older children were principally apparent in terms of (substantial) gains in literacy and numeracy. With almost three-quarters of enrolled 12–17 year olds attending at least 70 per cent of CYLC sessions, and more than one-third attending 90 per cent of them, the programme was clearly successful in engaging with this age group. Beyond literacy and numeracy, however, the curriculum and approach of the CYLC appear to have been less aligned with the drivers of well-being among those aged 12–17 years (noting that reportage of protection concerns actually increased among attending youths). This lack of influence on older children is consistent with other studies conducted in this series of impact evaluations (Hermosilla et al., 2019), encouraging a substantive rethink of activities targeted at this age group.

The reasons given for non-availability for interview among those aged from 12–17 years at follow-up—such as migration to Addis Ababa, having established a trading business, and marriage—point to the social roles and contributions to households that

may be expected of youths in these environments, as well as to the potential role of structured activities to support the development of life skills, problem-solving, and agency. Indeed, Panter-Brick et al. (2018) documented substantial impacts on refugee youths' sense of insecurity, distress, and well-being during an eight-week programme with this orientation.

The potential for emergency interventions such as CYLCs to serve as foci of integrated, community-based activities to address the well-being of children and youths has been widely mooted (see, for example, Wessells and Kostelny, 2013), but the fulfilment of this ambition is rarely documented (Hermosilla et al., 2019). In this study, the consequences narrowly centred on educational attainment. Not only were the activities of youths not adapted to livelihood issues, but the persistence of health concerns highlighted in participatory discussions suggested little contribution by CYLCs to health education or facilitated referral.

Important limitations warrant caution in the interpretation and generalisation of the findings. First, the construction of the counterfactual of non-attenders at the CYLC was not through random allocation. Assumed equivalence of non-attenders to attenders was based on the availability of places at the CYLC being far less than population demand, and statistical confirmation that attenders and non-attenders did not differ significantly with respect to any measured variable at baseline. A planned quasi-experimental study—with staged openings of the CYLCs and places allocated to camp blocks selected at random—did not prove practically or politically feasible, with ARRA and World Vision International staff reluctant to turn away children from a centre on the basis of block allocation while places were available. Attenders and non-attenders may differ in relation to factors not gauged in this study, but they were well matched in terms of demographic measures (including the proportion of children drawn from vulnerable households) and baseline measures (although there was a non-significant trend for girls with somewhat greater development assets at baseline to attend the CYLC subsequently).

Second, although the CYLC teaching curriculum was well documented, other aspects of the initiative—notably psychosocial activities—were not. The fidelity of programme implementation with regard to original goals is uncertain, and there is the noted evidence that time allocated for psychosocial activities was ultimately curtailed. The findings are best interpreted, therefore, in the light of the broad structure of the intervention—regular, structured activities delivered in a safe space through trained and supervised facilitators—rather than any specific programming detail.

Third, while there is no evidence of the loss of study participants at follow-up having introduced any bias to the design (with no significant differences in demographic and baseline measures between those lost and retained), the study was less powered to detect potential differences resulting from CYLC attendance than originally planned given the reduced sample size at follow-up. In particular, the design was not statistically powered to identify reliably gender differences within age cohorts, and non-significant findings between boys and girls need to be treated cautiously as a result.



Despite these limitations, the study allows for the following conclusions to be drawn. Together, the findings suggest that in the context of a humanitarian emergency, CYLCs may provide an environment that promotes children's learning and guards against prevailing risks. Yet, enhancing children's psychosocial well-being—a stated goal of the programme but one that was deemphasised during the course of implementation—was only indicated as a benefit of the CYLC to younger children (and most significantly was evident among boys). A more explicit stress on activities promoting emotional and social well-being may be required to have wider advantage in this domain (Bangpan et al., 2017). Finally, these impacts need to be understood in the context of a trend—despite reports of increased concern about harsh camp conditions—for increased adaptation of children over time whether or not they attended a CYLC. While CYLCs may serve a useful promotive and protective function for displaced populations, such adjustment is an indication of the personal, familial, and community resources mobilised by children and youths—beyond formal NGO programming—to establish their identities as refugees in a new and challenging setting. The core value of such programming may be seen as fulfilling the humanitarian mandate to reduce suffering and to protect dignity by fostering and accelerating, rather than establishing, these processes of protection and adjustment.

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